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BY INTHEDESERT

*Institutes of the Christian  
Religion, Books 1-4  
(Allen Translation)  
John Calvin translated by John Allen*

At the head of the list of Calvin's writings stands his great dogmatic treatise — the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In a very literal sense this book may indeed be called his life-work. It was the first book he published after he had "devoted himself to God," and thus introduces the series of his works consecrated to the propagation of religion. But from its first appearance in the spring of 1536 to the issue of its definitive edition in 1559 — throughout nearly a quarter of a century — Calvin was continually busy with it, revising, expanding, readjusting it, until from a simple little handbook, innocent of constructive principle, it had grown into a bulky but compact and thoroughly organized textbook in theology. "The author's concernment is far more to bring out the logical force and the moral power of his own doctrine than to descant on the weak points of the opposing doctrine. What holds his attention is not the past but the future, — it is the reconstruction of the Church." What wonder, then, that it has retained its influence through all succeeding time? As the first adequate statement of the positive programme of the Reformation movement, the *Institutes* lies at the foundation of the whole development of Protestant theology and has left an impress on evangelical thought which is inefaceable. After three centuries and a half, it retains its unquestioned preeminence as the greatest and most influential of all dogmatic treatises. - Summary by Benjamin B Warfield

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